

Developing a Curriculum-based Educational Program

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This paper presents some fairly simple steps towards designing curriculum-based museum education programs. These steps are offered as a method to help museum or park staff develop such offerings for their site. The National Park Service has mandated that we now gear our educational offerings to such curriculum-based program offerings.

First, let us understand what it is we are going to create. Teachers customarily work from a lesson plan, an outline designed to present, analyze, observe and review and then test a body of school work which is called a lesson or unit. Each unit, which may consist of one or more lessons, typically has very specific goals and objectives and the test or follow-up activity is designed to see what the students have learned.

An educational program for an historic site should provide the same kind of unit outline of three parts: preparation or introduction; the analysis and observation, the site visit, and the follow up activity. The program must be structured to contain very specific goals and objectives.

The big difference between a program at an historic site and the typical classroom unit is that with a museum education program there is typically more than one person who plays the role of the teacher or presenter. The classroom teacher will do the preparation, there may be several interpreters who conduct the site visit, and the teacher will do the testing or assessment after the site visit. In addition, the person who books the tour at the site for the school group needs to make sure that the classroom teacher understands what the preparation and site visit will entail; this is actually a kind of teaching situation in itself.

It is important to point this out because it helps people to understand that this is a much more complex teaching situation than a simple lesson or unit presented in class by a single teacher. Obviously the goals and objectives need to be clearly delineated with an understanding of standard language and terminology used consistently through the three components of the unit.

Primary Focus: The Site Visit

The primary focus of any curriculum-based program must be on what there is to see and talk about when the site visit occurs. The essential questions are: What are the things that can be learned or observed from a site visit that cannot be gotten by other means; why should a class come to an historic site; what are the unique things the site has to offer?

It is extremely important that the “educational moment; the a-ha; the, oh--I get it;” be based on revelation and discovery that will occur during the site visit. It seems pretty obvious that we should start with what will happen at the site, but we are always amazed

at the number of activities that do not lead up to the site-specific topics that are presented in the actual tour. In many cases there is a generic one-size-fits-all mentality that has prevailed. But how do we identify these activities, topics and themes?

Focus on Interpretive Themes

Start with what you have and what you can talk about at your site as defined by your interpretive themes. These are the themes, topics and ideas that have been identified in your Interpretive Plan, (also called Interpretive Prospectus, Long Range Interpretive Plan or Comprehensive Interpretive Plan). If you have not developed a formal interpretive plan use the recurring “talking points” that are used when giving a tour. These are the recurring topics and themes that explain your site to the public. Typically there are three to five of these themes.

Obtain Curriculum Standards

Obtain the curriculum standards for the subject area and grade level to be addressed. These are state standards and are now readily available through the Internet. Examine these curriculum standards to determine which might be applicable and teachable for your situation. Make a list of the appropriate standards and distribute to your interpretive staff for discussion and review. It is a good idea to involve as many of the interpretive staff as you can in doing this for several reasons: One is that there will be greater input resulting in a variety of ideas, and secondly is to have the staff participate in developing a program they will ultimately be responsible for delivering and refining.

For example: Here are the necessary components that will be used for developing such a program for Sagamore Hill:

Interpretive Themes for Sagamore Hill

Family life of a well-to-do gentleman farmer, who was the 26th president of the US as lived one hundred years ago and used Sagamore Hill as the Summer White House.

Theodore Roosevelt as a public servant and office holder, the importance of citizenship and civic life as demonstrated by his example.

Conservation of natural resources; preservation; Sagamore Hill as an example of preservation; an examination of Roosevelt's work as the "first conservation president."

An understanding of technology and inventions that were available and as used by the Roosevelt family, and particularly those innovations that made communication and travel faster and more effective.

Social Studies Core Curriculum for New York State for Grade Four (selected standards)

The applicable standards (selected from many others appropriate for the site) follow:

Rural to urban to suburban migration

Representatives in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches as the local, State, and national levels of government and how they are elected or appointed to office

People elect and/or appoint leaders who make, enforce, and interpret laws.

Transportation, invention, communication, and technology

A comparison of the site's interpretive themes with the 4th grade standards will show that there are many areas in which Sagamore Hill's interpretive themes merge and overlap quite well with the 4th grade New York curriculum standards for social studies.

Now using these standards, identify the elements (objects, artifacts, ideas and topics) from the site that will be used to demonstrate these concepts to the visiting students. Do not worry yet about the tour content, simply identify the important elements that fit the categories identified. Some things you list will be artifacts, objects or items that are observable during a tour; some will be ideas or topics that the interpreter will discuss during the tour. *The focus should be on the story that your site tells and what can be seen during a visit.*

For example for Sagamore Hill, using the various NYS 4th grade standards, the following list can be assembled:

Rural to urban to suburban migration

TR, brought up in NYC, purchases land "in the country" and builds permanent home in Oyster Bay

An understanding of technology and inventions . . .

Transportation, invention, communication, and technology

Sagamore Hill as the first "Summer White House"

First time seat of executive power was moved from Washington, DC for extended period

Frequent and regular train travel

Extension of Long Island RR line to Oyster Bay

Frequent and regular delivery of the US mail (twice a day in many areas)

Telegraph and telephone service become widespread

Telephone at Sagamore Hill

Newspapers and the press become daily--publishing morning and evening papers

Responsiveness of the press to daily events; coverage of president becomes daily with reporters being assigned to TR for the first time

Technology as used by the Roosevelt family at Sagamore Hill . . .

Sagamore Hill demonstrating modern technology of its day
Windmill pumps water for pressure tank in attic providing running water in country home
Water heater coil in coal burning kitchen stove provided hot water to showers and kitchen
Flush toilets; bath tubs and showers for bathing
Central heating

Theodore Roosevelt as a public servant and office holder . . .

Representatives in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches as the local, State, and national levels of government and how they are elected or appointed to office.
People elect and/or appoint leaders who make, enforce, and interpret laws.

Theodore Roosevelt had many experiences in his life that helped shape his Presidency
Elected to the offices of New York State Assemblyman, and Governor, and later to the offices of Vice President and President
He was appointed to the positions of New York City Police Commissioner, US Civil Service Commissioner and Assistant Secretary of the Navy.
He volunteered to serve and helped raise the 1st US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment for the Spanish American War.
For about two years he was a rancher and deputy sheriff in the Dakota Territory.
Library where TR worked, wrote and conducted the affairs of state
Dining room where TR entertained many diplomats and visitors
Presidential pennant in North Room
North Room--many gifts from heads of state given to TR during his presidency are displayed.

Common or universal theme for all historic sites: Conservation, preservation, stewardship

We include conservation, preservation and the responsibility of stewardship among our themes because of TR's pioneering work in these areas. These are important concepts that must be taught and developed along with the site-specific topics, and may ultimately be the most important concepts that are learned. School children need to understand that the National Park Service and many other organizations care for special places saved by the American People so that all may experience our heritage. This should be a primary theme for every historical site.

Do this for each Interpretive Theme and you will develop a list of site-specific topics, ideas and objects based on the curriculum standards for the grade and subject area to be addressed. This list will become the core of your site visit and it will be what is used to develop the educational program. You may at this time already begin to see a "story line"

developing, with common threads that are traced through the site interpretive themes and curriculum standards. (You will probably have assembled far more information than you could possibly address in one site visit.) Let's call this our "database" for the fourth grade.

Establish Goals and Objectives

Using this core list or "database" begin to develop a set of goals and objectives that will be the basis of your program offering. Try to have all the interpreters work together to do this. Their participation will help them understand the full scope of the program you are developing and will increase the number of ideas that are suggested.

Objectives

Objectives are easier to do first. The key question to ask is: *What are the things that you want to have a student learn as a result of this educational program?* Remember that the core of the program should be based on the site visit with the idea that there be revelation and discovery by the students when they come for that experience. The objectives (and goals) will contain elements of factual information that will be addressed in the preparatory materials as well as elements that are observed and discussed during the site visit. Think of the objectives as the minimum of what students should take away from such an educational program.

Objectives for Sagamore Hill

At the end of the program, students will be able to:

Identify when Theodore Roosevelt was president and when he lived at Sagamore Hill and used it as the "Summer White House."

Describe some typical daily activities of the president and his family life at Sagamore Hill.

Describe the general setting of Sagamore Hill as working farm and what effect it had on the family's lifestyle.

Examine some of the achievements TR made as President of the United States as relating to TR's work as conservationist, peacemaker, presidential innovator, builder of the Panama Canal, etc. Give several examples of TR's accomplishments that affect our life today--TR's work as public servant, appointed and elected.

Understand some of the technologies and inventions available and used by the Roosevelt family. Understand some of the technology that made it possible to move the "White House" to Oyster Bay.

Establish Goals

The goals are easier to set, if you have the objectives in mind first. *The goals can be seen as the maximum amount of information that a student might be able to gather as a result of the program--a higher mark than the objectives.* Note that there is a fair amount of tweaking between the two categories that will go on as you develop your goals and objectives. Remember that the essential questions to keep in mind are: What are the things that can be learned or observed by a site visit that cannot be gotten by other means; why should a class come to the site; what are the unique things the site has to offer?

Goals for Sagamore Hill

To understand life at the turn of the 20th century as experienced by the Roosevelts; daily life of the family during a typical summer while Theodore Roosevelt was president.

To understand that TR was elected to several offices including that of New State Governor and President; that he served as an appointed official as New York City Police Commissioner and volunteered to serve in the US army during the Spanish American War

To understand how Sagamore Hill served as the "Summer White House" (1902-1908) for President Theodore Roosevelt and his family during a time period of advancement in technologies, utilized in the house by the family, and making it possible to move the seat of executive power from Washington DC to Oyster Bay.

Keep it Simple Stupid

When developing a program for an elementary class, do not try to address more than three or four themes and relevant curriculum standards. Remember to focus on what there is to discover at the site as the focal point of the tour. Pare down your goals and objectives to focus on manageable number. Try to develop a "story line" or thread that makes sense and keep within the parameters of your interpretive themes and the educational standards.

Keep this thought in mind: *"at the end of the day I will feel we have been successful if the kids walk away knowing the following four or perhaps, three things."* Have all your staff write down what they think is important, compare and use these to hone and refine as your minimal, "bottom line" objectives. This will help you focus on the basics. It is far better to produce a program that can reliably deliver these three or four concepts or topics than a program that aims in shotgun fashion at a variety of topics that misses most. Keep it simple.

If we were to do this for Sagamore Hill, these would be our "bottom line" of four items.

1. Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th US President and used Sagamore Hill as the Summer White House (first time moved from Washington DC for extended period).

2 . Sagamore Hill was working farm and was used to bring up his family of six children; family life.

3. TR as elected and appointed public servant; governor; police commissioner; president; TR as peacemaker, conservationist and preservationist; Sagamore Hill as a local example of preservation.

4. Technology—both for the family life (windmill, indoor plumbing, hot water, central heat plant, etc.) and Summer White House (communication, telephone, telegraph, transportation, media and press coverage) were advanced for the day.

The biggest problem that most people have in developing any interpretive program is trying to include too much. You cannot teach all there is to know about TR or Sagamore Hill in one educational unit, it is impossible. Select the appropriate themes, topics and ideas and work on a manageable package. The goal is to create a program that can really deliver every time. If you can develop a program that most of the kids to walk away having learned the bottom line objectives you have a dynamite program.

Develop “Story Line” for the Tour Experience

These goals and objectives developed from the site interpretive themes and curriculum standards form the core of the educational program to be created. Using these goals and objectives and the “bottom line,” develop the story line for the site visit. You will find that there is a logical thread that will emerge. Follow this thread, or story line, to make a coherent tour.

Once again have the interpreters work together and use your standard tour outline format, decide how the information to be included will be covered in the tour presentation. It is important that you come to agreement on what topics will be covered at what exact location because many people associate information with the place where they learned it. So, for example at Sagamore Hill, a discussion of TR as president is done at the North Room since the presidential pennant and numerous gifts TR received as president are on display.

Continue to work this out until you have developed a total tour outline that captures the goals and objectives and especially the bottom line items for your site. Come to agreement as to what will be the focus and where the main elements will be discussed. You may find you need to adjust your goals and objectives as you do this.

Establish a tour outline with topics, themes and ideas and the exact location on the tour route that will be used for this specific educational program. You need to be certain that you discuss or talk about, point out, observe each of the ideas or topics you have identified as your objective or bottom line. Obviously each different grade level will require its own specific outline.

Standard Terminology

As the program develops, you will need to come to agreement about standard terminology. Remember that the terms used in the site visit must be the same as those that will be used in the preparatory materials, as well as the follow-up activities.

For example: Technology is one thing that is discussed at Sagamore Hill; communications technology for creating the Summer White House and technology of the house and home for the family. We have to establish exactly what to mention and decide upon standard terminology. So for communications technology we discuss the telegraph, telephone, frequent mail delivery and the development of wire services and facsimile. For household technology we discuss the windmill, pressure tank, indoor plumbing and flush toilets, water heater coil in the kitchen range and central heating. There has to be parity in the preparatory material, the tour experience and the follow-up activity. (Some of these will also present topics for definition and discussion in the preparatory material as well.)

Try it Out

Once you have your tour outline for established, try it out. A role-play scenario with one person leading the other interpreters playing the students is good way see if the outline is workable and will fit in the time frame that you can devote to a class tour visit. (If you can involve local teachers who have always used the site it is a good idea to include them as well.) You have to really do the tour—the leader will present the agreed upon format for the other interpreters playing students, and you will quickly see where the program needs adjustment. Come to agreement on your draft outline after you have tried it out.

Now you have the core of your curriculum-based program and it is possible to list on one or two pages:

- Interpretive themes for the site
- Appropriate/applicable curriculum standards
- Goals and objectives for the program
- “bottom line” objectives

(And a separate document has been developed: The tour outline for the specific grade and subject area based on your site.)

Create an Assignment

Any laboratory situation including a field trip to an historic site requires the creation of an assignment: What is it that you want students to do, examine, look for, discover when they come for a site visit? The assignment will create the focal points, based on the above themes, standards, goals and objectives you have created for this program, which you want the students to use when they come for the site experience. The assignment is a very important part of the preparation and needs to parallel the goals and objectives that have been developed.

Here follows a very elaborate listing that was developed for Sagamore Hill. These items are quite comprehensive and are developed for class discussion prior to the site visit.

Topics and Themes for Student Observation and Investigation During Site Visit

Theodore Roosevelt as public servant; role model

TR was known for his work as President, peacemaker, conservationist, and Spanish-American War Hero. What evidence can you find in the home relating to these specific areas?

TR is often referred to as the first "conservation" president. What are the artifacts, objects, or artworks in the home that remind us of this work in conservation and preservation in the US?

Sagamore Hill has been preserved as a national historic site as part of the National Park Service. What evidence did you find of conservation and preservation during your visit. How do you think visitation has impacted the site. How does the preservation effort found at Sagamore Hill compare with other historic sites you may have seen?

The Library and North Room on the main floor of the house were very special to TR. After seeing these rooms, what kind of a man do you think TR was? If you had the chance to sit down for a visit with TR which room would you choose? Why? Which room do you think TR would choose? Why? What item would you like to know more about?

After visiting Sagamore Hill, what is the strongest and most lasting impression you have?

What kind of life do you think the Roosevelt children experienced at Sagamore Hill?

Mrs. Roosevelt ran the household and the farm as operations manager. What do you think her life was like? How about the housekeeper? The cook?

What was your favorite thing at Sagamore Hill?

What did you have the biggest problem with?

Family life:

Your visit to Sagamore Hill will involve glimpses into the life of Theodore Roosevelt, a well-to-do gentleman farmer, who was the 26th US president, and his family.

Your assignment is to look for evidence of family life. Living space, food preparation and dining, recreation and leisure, communication, bedrooms, bathrooms, servants quarters are all apparent in the home.

Look for areas or items that are similar to those that you know, as well as areas that are quite different. Imagine what it might have been like to spend an evening

in the home, be invited for a meal, or spend the night. What would it be like to get up in the morning and get ready for school? What if, on a rainy Saturday you had to spend the time here indoors? What kind of activities would be available?

Remember that in addition to Mr. & Mrs. Roosevelt and the six children, there were four to six servants who lived in the home, an additional six to ten servants who worked the grounds, fields and gardens and took care of the animals, as well as secretaries, aides and advisors to the president and the Secret Service. Frequently there were guests in both of the guest rooms. The family, the guests, all of the help, and many of the staff people were fed at meal times. What kind of impact do you think having Sagamore Hill function as the Summer White House had on the family? --on the servants?

Technology and inventions

Sagamore Hill was used as the Summer White House from 1902 to 1908. Based on your knowledge of technology and communication, look for examples of such devices in the home.

Imagine that you have an urgent need to communicate with Washington DC on behalf of the president. How would you go about getting a message through. How many telephones do you find in Sagamore Hill, how many lines were available? How about letters and letter writing? What if you had to send an important document to Washington, signed by the president, how might you accomplish this?

Sagamore Hill utilized some technology and inventions that were not at all common for a house in the country a century ago. What are some of the technological devices available and used by the Roosevelt family at Sagamore Hill. Hint: lighting, heating, water pressure, hot water, flush toilets, bathrooms, food storage and preparation are all areas that we take for granted; how were these things accomplished at Sagamore Hill?

A concise distillation, which could be distributed or talked about on the bus on the way to the site, could be developed in this manner:

You might start with your “bottom line” goals/objectives as a short list:

1. Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th US President and used Sagamore Hill as the Summer White House (first time moved from Washington DC for extended period).

Question/assignment: Who was Theodore Roosevelt and what was significant about Sagamore Hill?

2 . Sagamore Hill was a working farm and was used to bring up his family of six children; family life.

Question/assignment: How would you describe Sagamore Hill and how would you describe family life there?

3. TR as elected and appointed public servant; governor; police commissioner; president; TR as peacemaker, conservationist and preservationist; Sagamore Hill as a local example of preservation.

Question/assignment: What were some of the positions TR held as public servant and what were some of the roles he played? What example of preservation can you cite?

4. Technology—both for the family life (windmill, indoor plumbing, hot water, central heat plant, etc.) and Summer White House (communication, telephone, telegraph, transportation, media and press coverage) were advanced for the day.

Question/assignment: What are some examples of technology you can find at Sagamore Hill that you can find that were used by the family? What are some examples of technology that made it possible for presidential operations to function at Sagamore Hill?

Here is another assignment that was created for a web-based program:

“Tomorrow, we are taking a trip to Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, the home of President Theodore Roosevelt and his family,” explained Mr. Baumer to his class of sixth grade students at Syosset Middle School. “For the visit, I am going to assign you to one of three groups. Each group will become an expert on one theme during the visit. Group 1 will focus on Theodore Roosevelt and his work as a public servant, peacemaker, conservationist, and military hero. As they tour the home and grounds, they will look for evidence that relates to each of these roles. Group 2 will become our experts on the Roosevelt family and their life at Sagamore Hill. They will look for clues to help them describe daily life at Sagamore Hill during the years when Theodore Roosevelt was president, including how his six children spent their time. Group 3 will focus on technology and inventions. They will look for answers to the question, What technology made it possible for Theodore Roosevelt to make Sagamore Hill the ‘Summer White House’ from 1902 to 1908?

“Everyone should bring clipboards and some paper and pencils. Imagine that you are detectives, looking for clues to help you answer these questions.”

You will need to tweak all of these—the goals, objectives, the tour outline and the assignment as you begin to pilot your program and to run it. Be ready to adjust any of these areas as you see how it works and what reactions you get.

The Interpreter's Manual: The Tour Outline Based on Your Site's Resources

Now the hardest part is done. *You have created a tour outline complete with goals, objectives and an assignment based on what you have to offer at your site.* This is the core of your curriculum based educational program for the grade level and subject area. From this body of information you can now create the *Interpreter's Manual for [Fourth Grade Social Studies] for [Sagamore Hill]*. This body of work will be the basis for creating the rest of the materials. (Repeat the same activities to develop a similar “database” and materials for other grades and subject areas. There will be overlap from what has been created and subsequent educational programs will be much easier to create.)

Interpreter's Manual

The Interpreter's Manual should contain all the information mentioned above (tour outline, goals, objectives and an assignment based on what you have to offer at your site). The core of it will be the tour outline. An overview and introduction establishing the themes and curriculum standards that will be addressed should be created. While we do not suggest memorization of materials the information should capture the salient points and reinforce what has been presented in the assignment.

For example:

Overview and introduction

Welcome to Sagamore Hill. . .

Brought up in NYC; built permanent residence in Oyster Bay

Home of Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th US President and used Sagamore Hill as the Summer White House (first time executive power was moved from Washington DC for an extended period).

Sagamore Hill was a working farm and was used to bring up his family of six children; you will observe many examples of family life during your visit.

TR as elected and appointed public servant; governor; police commissioner; president; TR as peacemaker, conservationist and preservationist;
Sagamore Hill, National Park site as a local example of preservation.

We will talk about and you will see examples of technology—both for the family life (windmill, indoor plumbing, hot water, central heat plant, etc.) and Summer White House (communication, telephone, telegraph, transportation, media and press coverage) were advanced for the day, etc. etc.

Assemble and Create Preparatory Materials

Now the preparatory activities can be assembled. You will find that if you have developed the site activity you can more readily and accurately address the topics, ideas and themes that need to be explored in order to prepare the students for the site visit. Here is the place to do the “book learning,” research and web exploration for students to

get the background information that is readily available in the classroom, library, or on the web.

Here are some activities that are traditionally used:

- Report/research/discussion topics

 - For example: wire services; facsimile; telegraph, for example

- Reading assignments; selected excerpts

- Book reports

- Document analysis

- Map analysis

- Photo, drawing or political cartoon analysis

The topics and themes proposed and discussed should provide the background information that will not be observed during the site visit. The focus here should be on the historical facts and figures, and placement in historical context so that the students will have an idea of who they are studying, what he/she/they did, what offices and jobs, and what their major accomplishments were, are important at this time.

There will be some topics and ideas that are not readily captured or explained by such traditional assignments that you feel should be addressed before a site visit and therefore need to be covered in a teacher's manual. For example, here is a brief article on newspapers and media of the day, which was created by Sagamore Hill staff for inclusion. This is presented in traditional format often used for teacher's manuals. A research topic of "wire services" is a good addition to the student list.

Technology, facsimiles, newspapers, wire services

While the Spanish-American War today is not regarded as a major event, it was the first "modern war" and the first war covered and reported on a daily basis by reporters. Technology had improved so that almost every city had daily papers with the ability to receive articles and photos via "wire services" thus making these images available across the land in a way never before possible. A reporter was now able to send an article across the nation so that daily events could be reported immediately in many newspapers. As today, with our fascination for immediate reporting of world events via 24 hour-a-day TV news programs, the people of a century ago grabbed up the papers as soon as they hit the streets.

TR became aware of this media responsiveness during the war period and used this knowledge to his advantage throughout the remainder of his career. It also made the "Summer White House" at Oyster Bay possible

Activity:

Do you think that presidents and leaders of today understand the media response? What examples can you cite?

Assembling the Teacher's Manual: What to Include?

The teacher's manual should include the following:

- Introduction
- Basic rules of conduct
- Preparatory material/background information
- Themes, goals and objectives
- Assignment for students
- Follow-up/post visit activities
- Map or travel instructions

Avoid the temptation of creating a textbook on your subject or topic area. Remember that most teachers do not spend more than one or two lessons in preparing for a field trip. There is a tendency to assemble so much material that it is overwhelming for a teacher to approach. Get the information that you think is necessary together and then see if each of its components fits in the total program, remembering that it should relate to the "database" and tour outline that you have created and not tell the life story of the historic figure.

Follow-up Activity or Test

Since the interpreters have assembled the program they are the ones in the best position to create the follow up activity. Once again it should be based on the same body of information that was used to create the tour themes, goals and objectives for this specific grade and subject area. The assignment that you created could well be used as the basis for this test activity, as could the goals and objectives by simply rephrasing the statement in the form of a question for essay type responses. Create at least one other test or quiz instrument that does not ask for essay type responses. If you can, involve local teachers who are familiar with the subject area.

Question/assignment: Who was Theodore Roosevelt and what was significant about Sagamore Hill?

Question/assignment: How would you describe Sagamore Hill and how would you describe family life there?

Question/assignment: What were some of the positions TR held as public servant and what were some of the roles he played? What example of preservation can you cite?

Question/assignment: What are some examples of technology you can find at Sagamore Hill that you can find that were used by the family? What are some examples of technology that made it possible for presidential operations to function at Sagamore Hill?

Posting all your educational materials on your website --*Teacher's Manual with the Preparatory Materials and Follow-up Activities*--will get you out of the printing and

mailing business; however, be prepared to send in print format to any teacher who needs the materials.

Booking Your School Program: Selling Your Product

After the development of your site's tour outline, probably the most important critical factor in creating successful school visits is marketing it as an educational program. Avoid all tendencies simply "to book" a group. The concept that "there's a class and we have an open space on the calendar," must be completely eradicated.

You must describe, market and run your offering as a complete program containing three element: the preparation, the site visit, and the follow up activity. You really want to speak to the teacher of the class who will be preparing and bringing the class to the site. Do not book a tour with teacher's aides, volunteers, secretaries, or accept "block bookings" (one teacher books entire 4th grade, for example). Explain that you will only make arrangements for the teacher who will agree to do the preparation and follow up activities, and will actually bring the class. (Sagamore Hill actually has a letter of agreement that is issued that lays out exactly what we expect to happen regarding preparation, site visit and follow up activities.) You will find that groups booked with less than four weeks of lead time will arrive poorly or not prepared.

Pilot Test Your Program and Get Feedback

Do not think of your program as being complete, but rather run it and see where it needs attention. If you can get a group of teachers to come to try it out that would be excellent. Send the Teacher's Manual and have them come to play the role of students and ask them to comment and help you hone and refine.

It is also a good idea to record impressions of those who participate in the program. Create a query form or feedback sheet to distribute to each teacher who brings a group; similarly get feedback from each of the interpreters for each group they take on tour. This information will help you further refine your program offering.

Here follows the Sagamore Hill introduction to our educational resources posted on our website:

We have recently revised our offering for school groups, to provide a curriculum-based educational program for Sagamore Hill. We have worked to create a package in which the background information, the tour outline for the site visit, and the follow-up activities are all based on the same themes, goals, and objectives. The result is that the students receive preparation by the teacher, come to see Sagamore Hill, and are tested upon their experiences so that there is a learning situation based on the total experience, which will help the students retain what they have studied and seen.

With the understanding that providing services for educational groups at Sagamore Hill requires considerable time and resources on our part, we are asking

the teacher or educational group leader to agree to prepare adequately prior to the group visit. Thus the Education Program entails far more than booking a date for the class visit, requiring a commitment by the teacher to prepare and teach a unit of one or more sessions, bring the class for the site visit, and perform the follow-up activity.

The educator's packet (see web links below) includes the background information for preparation, the procedures for a class visit, the mandatory Ground Rules Activity, and follow-up activities. We are asking you to spend at least one class lesson in preparation for your visit. A letter of agreement, arranged with each teacher scheduling a class visit, will outline the responsibilities required. Please understand that we will book reservations only for the teachers wanting to bring classes who are willing to agree to fulfill the Educational Program requirements.

Our experience has shown that adequate preparation will make the class visit go smoothly and may provide a curriculum-based experience for the class trip. It is highly recommended that follow-up activities, in the form of discussion, quiz, test, essays or reports, be administered to the class for reinforcement. (Note that it is the responsibility of the teacher to fulfill all the requirements for making the trip a curriculum-based activity.

Of all the things that we do as interpreters creating and delivering educational programs for young people is just about the most important thing we do. You have probably heard the adage that “no one died of bad interpretation,” but our historic sites will die if we do not reach our young people and begin to instill in them a sense of history and its incumbent responsibility of stewardship and care of historic sites.

The universal theme discussed earlier for all sites of conservation, preservation, stewardship as exemplified by TR’s pioneering work and record in these areas is an overarching theme that can only be taught a unit at a time, at various historic sites by dedicated interpreters. These are important concepts that must be taught and developed along with the site-specific topics. School children need to understand that the National Park Service and many other organizations care for special places saved by the American People so that all may experience our heritage.

■ C. A. Markis, September 2003

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A copy of this document is available via email or in print upon request.

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If you have further questions, comments or need assistance
you may reach Charles Markis at 516-922-4271 x15.